

EXCERPT FROM SECRETARY McNAMARA'S TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE MAHON COMMITTEE
(lineated transcript)
(February 6, 1963)

Mr. Lipscomb: . . . I do want to say, however, that I am as disturbed about understatements as I am about exaggerated statements.

Let me give you an example of an understatement by a responsible member of the Executive Branch of the Government . . . the Under Secretary of State, Mr. George Ball . . . On page 891 of these hearings Kitchen Committee on October 37 Mr. Ball had this to say, and I quote:

"Mr. Ball: In the first place, our intelligence with respect to Cuba, as I say, is very hard and very good and very comprehensive as a result of the number of refugees constantly coming out and other kinds of opportunities that are provided to gain information with regard to the Cuban situation."

Here the Under Secretary of State, Mr. George Ball, first commenting on the competence of the intelligence that the Executive Branch of the Government was receiving. On page 894 of the hearings Mr. Ball made this statement:

"Up to this point we have no evidence that there are any surface-to-surface missile installations in Cuba capable of fixing to a greater range."

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891 of these hearings Mr. Ball had this to say, and I quote:

"Mr. Ball. In the first place, our intelligence with respect to Cuba, as I say, is very hard and very good and very comprehensive as a result of the number of refugees constantly coming out and other kinds of opportunities that are provided to gain information with regard to the Cuban situation."

Here is the Under Secretary of State, Mr. George Ball, first commenting on the competence of the intelligence that the Executive Branch of the Government was receiving. On page 894 of the hearings Mr. Ball made this statement:

"Up to this point we have no evidence that there are any surface-to-surface missile installations in Cuba capable of firing to a greater range."

The sentence before he had made the statement that they did have surface-to-surface missiles capable of firing to a range of 25 to 35 miles. I remind you that Mr. George Ball, Under Secretary of State, testifying before a Congressional Committee, hearings published, says there was no evidence.

Now, the evidence submitted to this Committee yesterday by CIA, the statement submitted by you today, certainly

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contradict Mr. George Ball. Is that correct?

Secretary McNamara. It does not contradict the implication that he was speaking for himself. He did not say no one in Government had evidence. He said, I think by implication, he did not have evidence. I believe that was a fair statement at that time.

I would like to ask Joe to check my own memory of this. I do not believe there was distributed in writing in the normal flow of intelligence reports either the daily intelligence summary or the other periodic intelligence summaries, any evidence that there were ballistic missiles in Cuba as of October 3rd. Joe, I may be in error, but I believe I am right in that.

General Carroll. That is very correct, sir.

Secretary McNamara. Therefore, I would simply say, without endeavoring to certify or endorse the full statement, that I believe George Ball was correct when he said, by implication--I have no evidence that there are ballistic missiles in Cuba today.

Mr. Ford. As I understand the facts--we have a member of the Committee who was present there on this

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Committee--Mr. Ball was interrogated quite extensively on this whole matter. He, I will not say ducked being categorical, but he asked authority to set the record straight. Mr. Lipscomb, who was a member of that Committee and who is a member of this Committee, can give the full story, but I believe Mr. Ball went back to the office and verified it and then had it inserted in the record.

What amazes me is that the second highest officer in the Department of State in the Executive Branch of the Government made such a serious understatement of the facts. He said there was no evidence, he did not qualify it, he said no evidence. This is completely wrong according to CIA, completely wrong from the testimony given to this Committee this morning.

Secretary McNamara. I would disagree with the way your question was phrased. I think it bears on Mr. Ball's answer. If I recall the way the question was phrased, you stated Mr. McCone stated that starting -- this is the important part -- starting September 18, his agency received information relating to the possibility of ballistic missiles in Cuba.

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That is not true because we had been receiving information relating to ballistic missiles in Cuba for months and months and months.

Mr. Ford. This is a very important point. I am glad you brought it up. We had lots of gossip throughout the whole intelligence community from various sources as to this possibility. But this was the finest time CIA agents, according to what he said -- if I am wrong, we have the record and it can be corrected -- that this information came to them.

Secretary McNamara. I cannot speak with any authority on this because I do not know the agent or the comparison here. But I think you are placing too much weight on the reliability of an agent report as opposed to the reliability of a non-agent report. An agent is carrying more weight or connoting more here than I think is warranted. That particular report, even at the time, I believe, was thought to be a particularly important report by many people having access to it. I think General Carroll can speak with more knowledge to it.

Mr. Ford. It was an important source of information --

Secretary McNamara. Even at the time. But there had been many important sources of information proven false, and

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that particular report was thought to be important not because, by itself, it gave great evidence there were ballistic missiles, but because it pinpointed an area sufficiently and appeared to carry sufficient weight to warrant targeting that area for the next high altitude reconnaissance flight to determine whether photographic evidence would support the contention. I think that was the importance of it. I am almost positive in my own mind that Secretary Ball knew nothing about it when he testified.

I think it very likely there was no information readily available to him. If he went back to check and he then inserted in the record that statement, I think that is an entirely accurate report of his knowledge and understanding as of that date.

Mr. Ford. Is it not a little strange that the second highest official in the Department of State, when asked a specific question, would not know the answer, particularly after he had gone back and allegedly or supposedly checked the record? I am not going to argue with you about the niceties of evidence. We all agree there was evidence. It was in possession of responsible people in the Executive Branch of

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the Government. Mr. Ball said there was no evidence.

Now, the point I really want to make is this. You have made some very serious charges about responsible people in the Congress, the Legislative Branch, alleging they have overexaggerated certain facts or certain conditions.

I think it is just as serious, if not more so, to underestimate them and to have it come from a responsible person in the Executive Branch of the Government.

Secretary McNamara. But the charge should be not what Ball said. The charge should be what McNamara said, and McNamara should be asked to demonstrate it. I am prepared to demonstrate it. I would like to put this in the record. This is what was said and what I responded to in the House Committee you referred to. These are the exact words coming out of the Congressional Record of January 31 of the Senate.

"There is continuing absolutely confirmed and undeniable evidence that the Soviets are maintaining and guarding the medium range sites they have previously constructed in Cuba. There has been no Soviet move to dismantle these concrete sites or withdraw the launching bases."

Here are all of the nine sites. Here are pictures

taken at the height of construction activity and as recently as the 27th of January that prove conclusively that that statement is incorrect. I think I am not only justified but responsible for so reporting it to the American people.

Mr. Ford. I am not going to argue facts or lack of facts about the statements made. I am simply saying that it is just as serious from the point of view of the American people for a responsible person in the Executive Branch of the Government to underestimate the facts or not tell the facts.

Secretary McNamara. I could not agree with you more, and I do not believe I have done that.

Mr. Ford. I am not saying, Mr. Secretary, you have done it; I am not even implying it. I am saying that a responsible person, the second highest official in the Department of State, underestimated when he said there was no evidence. That is not true. The facts are there was evidence.

Mr. Minshall. Will you yield a moment on that point?

Mr. Ford. Surely.

Mr. Minshall. Mr. Secretary, I have in front of me a

record made in this Committee Room on September 28, at which time we had your Deputy Secretary, Mr. William Bundy, before us. Along the same line of questioning that was asked of Mr. Ball, we asked Mr. Bundy a question. Mr. Mahon said, and I quote: "A brief question at this point. Some people are saying, including the people in Government, including refugees from Cuba, that they have at this time and have had for quite some time ballistic missiles, nuclear ballistic missiles, in Cuba. The Cubans or the Russians have some ballistic missiles in Cuba. Does the military" -- here is the question -- "have an intelligence indicating the existence of nuclear ballistic missiles in Cuba?" Any intelligence. That is my quote. "Mr. Bundy. No sir, it does not."

Secretary McNamara. I think that is an entirely accurate statement, and any statement to this Committee must always be prefaced by the implied clause, "to the best of my knowledge, it has not."

Mr. Minshall. He did not put that here. Nothing in here. He said the question was very clear. His answer is very clear. I think you are reading something into here that is not here. He was sent here to brief us on Cuba--period.

That is what he briefed us on. The buildup about the missiles. This is his answer.

Secretary McNamara. At this particular time --

Mr. Minshall. This is your representative.

Secretary McNamara. At this particular time there were a series of contradictory reports on missiles in Cuba.

Mr. Minshall. This is one of them.

Secretary McNamara. The reports were based upon the most recent reports about that time were based upon, I believe, three particular reports having been received some time between September 18 and September 21. There was no, as I understand it, at that point, no agreement as to whether this was indicative of ballistic missiles in Cuba or not. All that it was sufficiently indicative of was the need for scheduling that area for the next reconnaissance flight.

Mr. Minshall. I say most respectfully, Mr. Secretary, you have said before this Committee today you considered CIA agents reports reliable. That was a report from a CIA representative at least.

Secretary McNamara. I do not believe I said I considered CIA agents' reports always reliable.

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Mr. Minshall. You consider it credible as opposed to refugee testimony.

Secretary McNamara. I do not believe I said that.

Mr. Minshall. Maybe it was the General.

Mr. Ford. General Carroll said it was just as important to have human agents as it was mechanical agents.

General Carroll. That is right.

Secretary McNamara. That I fully agree with, but that is quite a different statement.

Mr. Ford. Mr. Secretary, the circumstances in the illustration I gave are even different from the one given by Mr. Minshall. This was a hearing held in executive session, the record has never been published.

Secretary McNamara. You are speaking now of the Ball hearings?

Mr. Ford. Mr. Bundy's testimony.

Secretary McNamara. Yes.

Mr. Ford. The testimony I read from was a public statement in an open hearing, the hearings were published, by the second highest ranking official in the Department of State. There is a difference, this is very different. All

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I am trying to say is it is just as irresponsible, it is just as shameful for a responsible person in the Executive Branch of the Government to underestimate as it is for a member of the Legislative Branch to overestimate.

Secretary McNamara. I completely agree. I think in each case the important criterion is: Did the person have reason to believe contrariwise? In this particular instance --

Mr. Minshall. Mr. Secretary, you sent this man up to brief us on this point.

Mr. Ford. Let him finish.

Secretary McNamara. I think you might like to ask General Carroll to what degree this information had been circulated through the Government on that date.

General Carroll. I feel that I can address myself with some knowledge to these particular reports, Mr. Ford, because it was my office that analyzed these reports and as a result of our analysis did single out a particular suspect area in Pinar Del Rio Province, which was ultimately determined to have located there a medium range ballistic missile site.

Two of the reports to which reference has been made were agent reports. In and of themselves these reports did not

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mean a good deal at all. One of them was significant in location enabling us to pinpoint the point / involved because it did refer to a highly restricted area in Pinax Del Rio Province in / of a very irregular shape. But we had had many, many similar reports which we had run down in the past. Some of them turned out to be totally erroneous, and many of them had been associated with surface-to-air missile sites.

The one report that I deemed to be more significant than any other was actually a refugee report. But even those alone did not enable us to make the suspect type determination that we did. It was really an analysis of the location of SA-2 sites in the western part of the island, those which we had ascertained to exist elsewhere seemed to have a logical location in relationship to military installations. In the Pinax Del Rio area we noted a location of three in triangular form which just do / did not seem to make any sense in relationship to a particular military installation. Consequently, fitting all the things together, which took a period of days, we finally came up with an analysis which led us to suspect the possible presence of medium range ballistic missiles in Cuba. /

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Mr. Ford. That is the basis upon which I assume the Secretary in his statement said, and I quote, "After mid-September, however, reports of large missiles being introduced into Cuba were suggestive enough to arouse the suspicions of Defense intelligence analysts."

General Carroll. That is correct, sir.

Mr. Ford, I just want to repeat, I feel very strongly about this, all the bales in the world do not rest on people in the Executive Branch of the Government. A lot of people in the Executive Branch of the Government over the years have made a lot of mistakes, including the errors of talking too much and not telling all the truth, or not telling all that they know.

I am only suggesting that in this case Mr. Ball was underestimating the facts as they were known by the responsible people in the Executive Branch of the Government. He was stating it for the public record. This is a serious understatement, and it qualifies for the same language which you used in discussing statements made by members of the Legislative Branch of the Government.

Secretary McNamara. Mr. Chairman, may I respond by saying I share fully your basic theme that members of the

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Executive Branch have made errors in the past, I am sure are making them today, and no doubt will continue to make them in the future. They deserve to be criticized for errors as much as any other member of our society, certainly as much as any member of the Legislative Branch. I do not wish to speak for Mr. Ball because he can speak for himself. But, knowing your own sense of fairness, I do not think that there should remain in the record the implication, or at least not without any commenting on it, the implication that Mr. Ball knew or should have known of the error of his statement, because I think I am correct in saying that it was largely through analysis by General Carroll's Office that this suspicion arose. It was not based on a report that the suspicion arose. He had had thousands of reports like this.

What gradually formed in his mind was a hypothesis based on the integration of three or four pieces of evidence, one of which was not a report at all, one of which was a recognition through photographic analysis that a SAM site

appeared to be in a rather unusual place, a surface-to-air missile site. Gradually over a period of time -- I do not know over what period of time -- but some time between the 18th of September and the 14th of October there was formulated in his mind a hypothesis specifically that there was the possibility of a Soviet ballistic missile installation in a particular area, a hypothesis that had been formulated previously and had been tested previously and found to be in error with respect to other locations.

His only action here -- I think quite properly his only action here -- was to test that hypothesis, to submit it to the targeting group that targets the reconnaissance missions, and place that target on the track for the next reconnaissance mission which was the October 14 mission. I believe I am right in saying that Secretary Ball neither had nor had any reason to know of this information.

General Carroll. So far as I know, he did not.

Mr. Ford. Did the Secretary of State know it? Did the Secretary of State have this information?

General Carroll. I do not know, sir. So far as I know, he did not. He certainly at that time did not have the

benefit of the rationalization we were undergoing, because we wanted to put it to the test to determine whether we had anything adequately substantive to report.

Mr. Ford. Should not the Secretary of State know of some evidence of this sort? And if he did not know it or if his top assistant, Mr. George Ball, did not know it, there is something wrong with your reporting system in the Executive Branch of the Government.

Mr. Whitten. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. Ford. Yes.

Mr. Whitten. Off the record.

(Discussion off the record.)

Mr. Whitten. Having listened to this --and this might be more subject to criticism perhaps than the statement of Mr. Ball -- but the witnesses we had prior to your appearance, without calling names here, as I recall the testimony, testified that when evidence began to accumulate as to offensive weapons, that they restricted the distribution of the information where it did not even go to all the members of the intelligence community but only to a select few.

Mr. Sheppard. That is right.

Mr. Minshall. That is right.

Mr. Ford. That is correct, but I think I asked the question in preparation for the Secretary's appearance whether this --

Mr. Whitten. I doubt the wisdom of it, but I think this was the testimony.

Mr. Ford. -- whether or not this restricted distribution precluded the responsible people in the Department of State, and as I recall, Mr. McCone said it did not.

Secretary McNamara. Absolutely not; you are quite right.

Mr. Ford. I asked that question because I was expecting to get to this point today.

Secretary McNamara. I do not think I have quite explained clearly enough the tentative character of this suspicion. I use the word suspicion. All of the suspicions of our intelligence analysts are not submitted to me, for example daily. I have a hard enough time reading the intelligence reports that do come up. They are voluminous. At this point I think /it would have been inappropriate to distribute all these suspicions. So that I am almost positive in stating that

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Secretary Ball did not know of this.

I feel strongly that there was no reason why he should have known at that time of this kind of suspicion. There are hundreds of suspicions of this kind today in some areas of the world that are very important to us. Ninety-nine percent of the suspicions prove wrong.

Mr. Ford. But they were suggestive enough, according to your statement --

Secretary McNamara. To designate the area --

Mr. Ford. -- to arouse the suspicions of the Defense intelligence analysts.

Secretary McNamara. And, therefore, to designate the suspect area for the development of the specific flight path for the next U-2 reconnaissance mission. This is the key to it.

Mr. Ford. But the key to Mr. Ball's statement is "no evidence." He is the second ranking officer in the Department of State, and the facts are it is a serious understatement of what the situation was.

Mr. Sheppard. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. Ford. Surely.

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Mr. Sheppard. Mr. Secretary, let me ask you this. Your response is very disturbing to me. I will tell you why. How in the world can you interpret my testimony from the same script that you had yourself? How can you do that?

Secretary McNamara. I am not clear on your question, sir.

Mr. Sheppard. In other words, what you are responding to is the assumption of the testimony of Mr. Ball from the State Department. That is what you are trying to do. That is your privilege. But I think you are out of your jurisdiction. You are responsible for just what you give to this Committee, you, and nobody else. If you make a misinterpretation based upon the facts at issue, that is your responsibility. Why do you assume Mr. Ball might have done this or that? Are you not slightly in error there?

Secretary McNamara. No, sir; I have knowledge myself of the type of distribution given to this information, and that knowledge leads me to believe he did not have it. I thought Mr. Ford would want that knowledge.

Mr. Sheppard. I grant that. I know you will give Mr. Ford anything he wants. I understand that perfectly.

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Again I go back to one basic thing. The evaluation of testimony, written or interpreted, might be yours one way and X another away. I think, in fact, here you are getting yourself involved--and I am sorry to have to say this--in a substantive position as to what Mr. Ball should have said. I do not think that is your prerogative.

Secretary McNamara. I would be very happy to stop testifying for Mr. Ball. I appreciate your remarks.

Mr. Ford. Is that all, Mr. Sheppard?

Mr. Sheppard. Yes.

Mr. Ford. You have indicated, the presentation this morning indicates that the Soviet Union made sizable withdrawals of military equipment from Cuba following October 28 or thereabouts. The presentation also indicates that there are some 17,000 Soviet military personnel in Cuba, substantial surface-to-air missile systems, army equipment, and so forth.

What are we going to do about the situation as it presently exists? Are we going to accept the status quo?

Secretary McNamara. I think that the Government's policy has been stated as one which will not tolerate the use of Cuba as a base for exporting subversion throughout the Hemisphere.

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for a base of action which would endanger the security of the Hemisphere.

Mr. Ford. Do we know whether or not Soviet agents are being trained in Cuba today for export in the Caribbean area?

Secretary McNamara. Following Mr. Sheppard's advice, I think it would be better if I did not comment on this and allowed Mr. McCone to discuss it with you.

Mr. Minshall. Do you know whether they are?

Secretary McNamara. This is a subject that does not lie within the responsibility of the Defense Department, it does lie within the responsibility of the Director of Central Intelligence, and I think he should respond.

Mr. Minshall. He already has, and says they are.

Secretary McNamara. If he has, then you have the information.

Mr. Ford. Would it require more United States military forces today -- today, now -- to dislodge the Soviets from Cuba as compared with a United States force that would have been necessary a year ago or July 1, 1962?

Secretary McNamara. I think it is fair to say it would require more today than it would have a year ago, six

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months ago, and certainly more today than it would have required three years ago.

Mr. Ford. How many Soviet troops have been evacuated from Cuba?

Mr. Mahon. Off the record.

(Discussion off the record.)

Mr. Mahon. Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary and gentlemen.

(Adj). 4:00 p.m.

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